



DoD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program Status Report:

Sierra Leone



BACKGROUND

Introduction/General Information

Sierra Leone's population is estimated between 4.6 and 5.6 million people, with life expectancy ranging from 37 to 46 years. English is the official language in Sierra Leone, which has an in-country literacy rate estimated to be 33%; literacy is distributed disproportionately between the sexes. Sierra Leone is described as an extremely poor nation, even by sub-Saharan African standards, as a long civil war and ongoing social disorder preclude development; per capita income estimates range from \$130 to \$500.

Country HIV/AIDS Statistics and Risk Factors

Sierra Leone has HIV/AIDS prevalence rates ranging from 3% to 7% of the adult population with either HIV infection or AIDS. Estimates for the number of people believed to be living with HIV range from 68,000 to 170,000. Identified significant risk factors include high-risk heterosexual contact with both multiple partners and commercial sex workers.

Military HIV/AIDS Information

There are no reliable estimates currently available for the size of military forces in Sierra Leone, and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) have not performed

force-wide testing of personnel, making prevalence rates unavailable. It is believed that the military population currently has HIV prevalence rates higher than the national average.

PROPOSED PROGRAM

Sierra Leone requested funding and logistical assistance with a plan titled *Strategies to Control and Reduce the Rapid Spread of HIV Infections and AIDS Within the Sierra Leone Army*. Objectives outlined in the plan included expansion of existing laboratory facilities at all 34 military hospitals and other healthcare centers; ultimately, the Sierra Leone military intends to screen at least 60% of all personnel. Expanded facilities would be provided with new equipment for screening, and they would be fully staffed with trained laboratory assistants, technicians, nurses, and health educators.



US Ambassador and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces HIV/AIDS advisory team met to plan prevention programs.

In addition, Sierra Leone proposed enhancing its screening program with prevention education efforts, including provision of print and electronic training materials.

PROGRAM RESPONSE

Military-to-Military

Following receipt of the proposal from the RSLAF, a US Army officer working at the US Embassy on health issues contacted DHAPP staff. The officer requested military-to-military funding and stated that she would be coordinating HIV/AIDS prevention efforts at the US Embassy. DHAPP provided funding to support the proposal, and those resources resulted in a series of monthly regional training seminars for all RSLAF units deployed in the field. In FY04, no further military-to-military program activities are planned due to funding decreases. The Defense Attaché Office in country has expressed interest in further developing the program should funding become available.



Enthusiastic audience proudly wore red ribbons while attending an HIV/AIDS prevention kick-off.

Clinical Provider Training

A Sierra Leone military physician was approved to attend the 4-week *Military International HIV Training Program* in San Diego, California, in the summer of 2003.

Interoperability

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a site assessment in January 2003 in preparation for establishing a Global AIDS Program (GAP) Office in Freetown.

PROGRAM IMPACT

Master Trainers and Peer Educators

A total of 34 RSLAF personnel have received peer educator training.

Number of Troops Trained

To date, 1,572 RSLAF troops have received HIV/AIDS prevention training.

Voluntary, Counseling and Testing (VCT)

A total of 1,947 RSLAF troops and their dependents have received voluntary HIV testing and counseling to date.

Laboratory Capability/Infrastructure

The RSLAF HIV laboratory has a full-time laboratory technician who attended a 7-day senior laboratory technician HIV training course in March 2003. The lab is equipped for Rapid Response HIV test kits since other types of test kits are not suitable for the Western African environment. The RSLAF laboratory collaborated with a well-established private laboratory, Ramsey Labs, in Freetown. This collaboration helps to ensure quality of testing and accurate statistics. The RSLAF lab has 2 refrigerators, one of which has a freezer to store test kits and blood samples.

Mass Awareness

To date, 22 mass awareness campaigns have been conducted at bases and camps throughout the RSLAF.